




**What is the social economy?  
Contested ground or alternative lenses?**

## ‘Social economy’ precedents

- Significantly wider use and familiarity internationally, particularly in Europe and Latin America
- 1947 – CIRIEC - International Centre of Research and Information on the Collective Economy
  - *the public, social and co-operative economies*
- Quebec – 1990s economic crisis and tripartite engagement/recognition  Summit on the Social Economy and subsequent developments in Quebec
  - Le Chantier de l'économie sociale
  - Public policy and funding
  - Movement building and programs

# Precedents

- Interest beyond Quebec in the Quebec model, but little adoption of the language or the realities – some pushback as well
- Little consciousness of a ‘social economy’ and membership therein, though other language and consciousness is widespread by now – non-profit sector, voluntary sector, third sector, civil society, etc.

# The Social Economy Suite – a program of research with wider missions

- Martin Government's Social Economy Initiative
- Civil society responses – e.g. B.C. Social Economy Roundtable
- Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) – Social Economy Suite
- Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP) – National Hub and six regional nodes
  - 2005-2010 – Atlantic, Quebec, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan. Manitoba/Northern Ontario
  - 2006-2011 – BALTA and SERNNoCa (Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada)

# The social economy and social enterprise

## Conflated identities

- Emergence of social enterprise as a recognized model – using business models to achieve social goals
- To some degree a recognition of what already existed in some degree
- But very significant emergence and growth of a model
  - New approaches to achieving mandates and program goals
  - Reduced or constrained revenues versus ever increasing demands and new mandates
  - Enterprising Non-Profits
  - U.K. developments

# **The social economy and social enterprise**

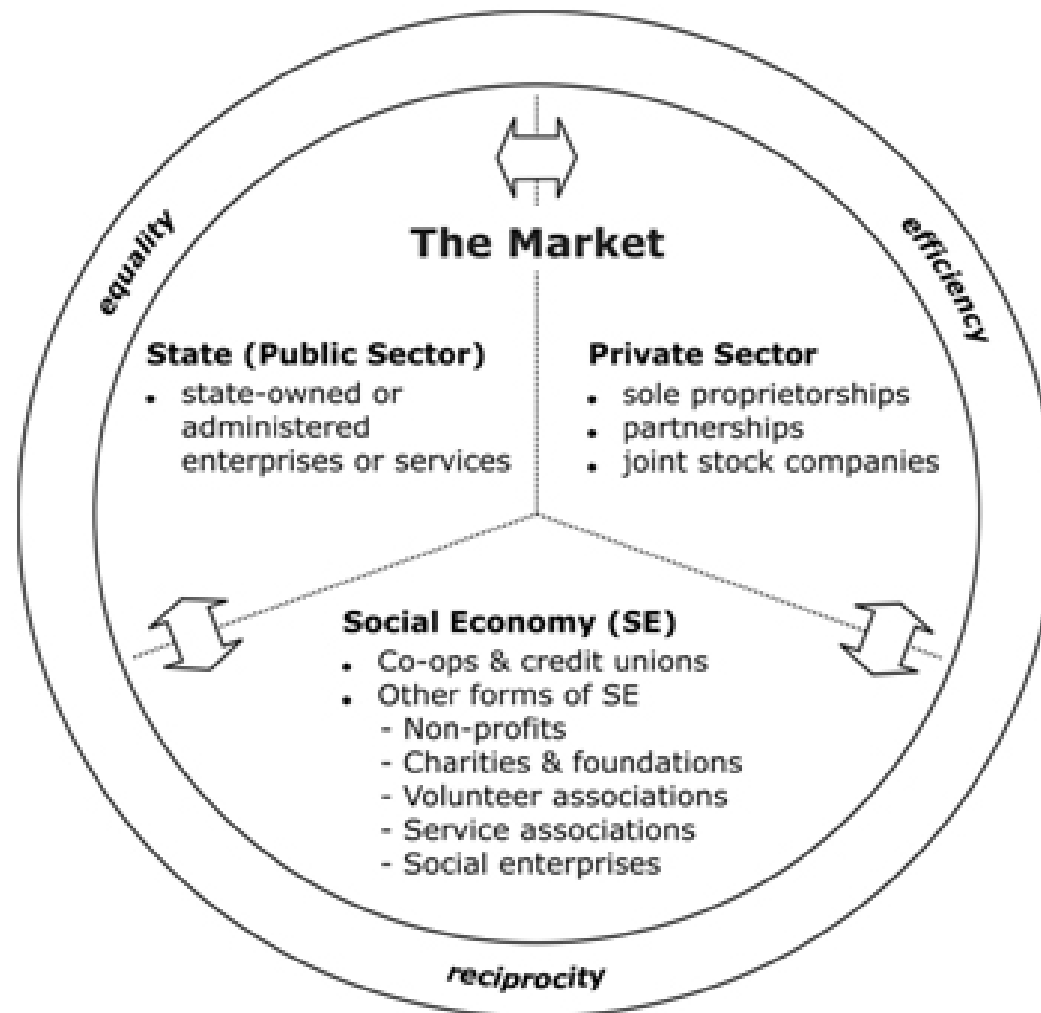
## **Conflated identities**

- To a very significant degree, both internationally and in Canada, the emergence of social enterprise as a recognized approach and field around the same time as debates around clarifying conceptually 'what is the social economy' have made that a major part of the debate

# The social economy – contested ground

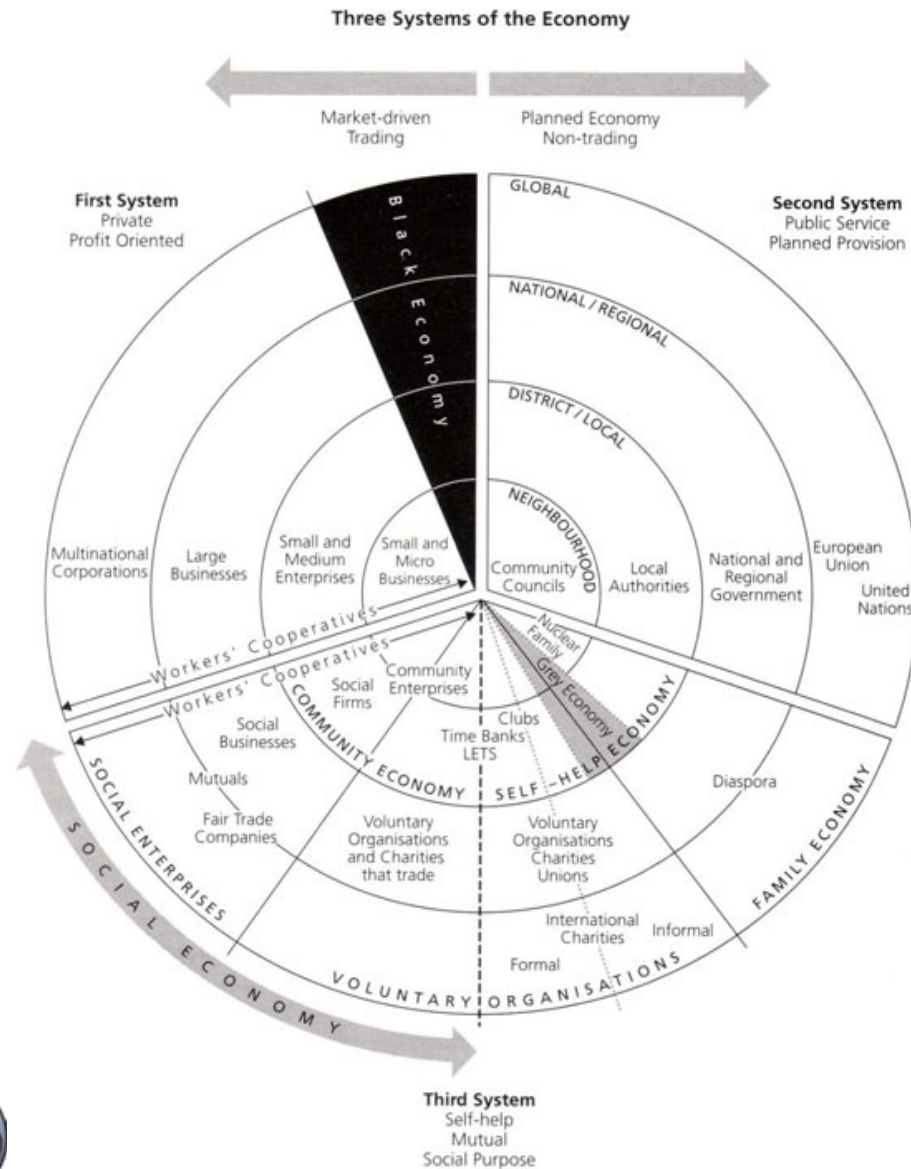
- Many views and nuances of definition and conception, but two broad views in some degree of contention
- The broad view – the social economy as essentially equivalent to civil society, the non-profit and cooperative sectors, the ‘third sector’, the voluntary sector, etc. – simply bringing a somewhat economic perspective to an existing frame
- A somewhat narrower view – the social economy is that part of civil society which uses business practices to achieve social ends – i.e. social enterprise and co-operative enterprise and mutual societies

# The broad view





# The somewhat narrower view – John Pearse



## **In Quebec, 'social economy enterprises' are characterized as manifesting the following:**

- aim to serve their members or the community as a whole, instead of striving for financial profit alone;
- are neither private businesses nor public agencies;
- establish a democratic decision-making process that involves the participation of users and workers;
- give priority to people and work rather than to capital in the distribution of revenue and surplus;
- are based on principles of participation, empowerment, and individual and collective responsibility.

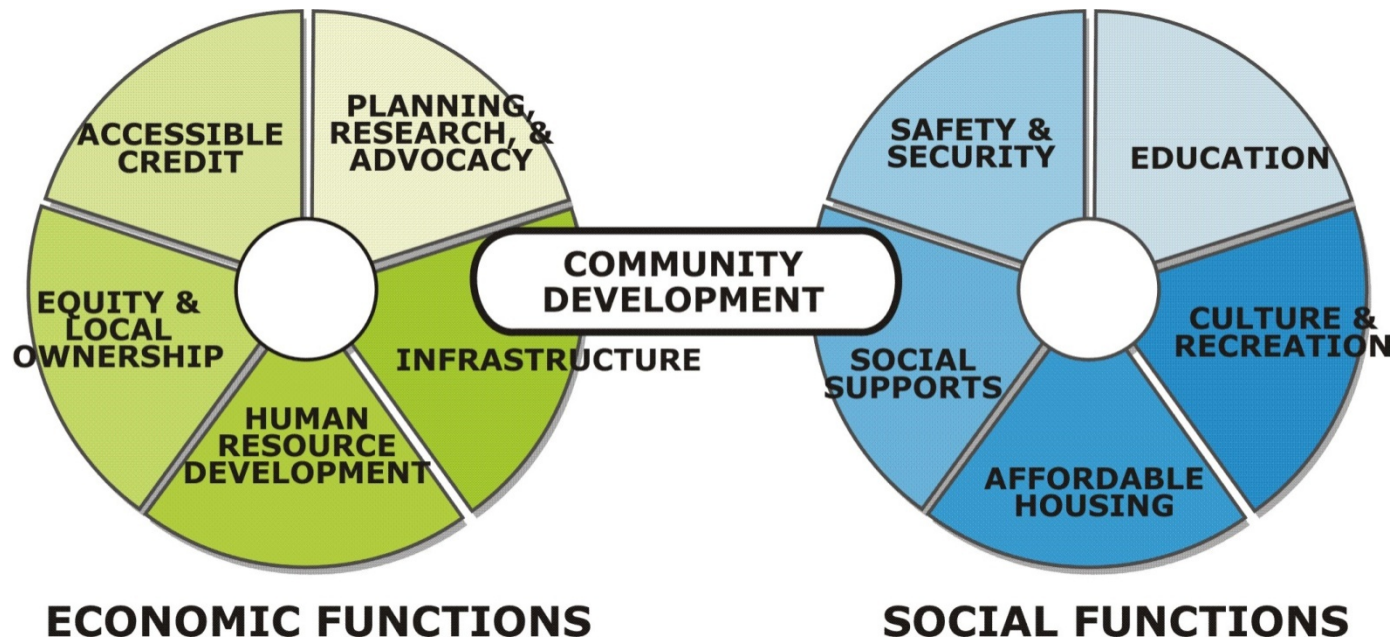
# **BALTA initially (derived from Pearse)**

## **Reciprocity combined with business**

- SEs have a social purpose or purposes.
- SEs achieve the social purposes, at least in part, by engaging in trade in the marketplace.
- SEs do not distribute profits to individuals.
- SEs hold assets and wealth in trust for community benefit.
- SEs democratically involve members of its constituency in the governance of the organisation.
- SEs are independent organisations accountable to a defined constituency and to the wider community.

# Does it matter?

Why choose  
one definition or another?



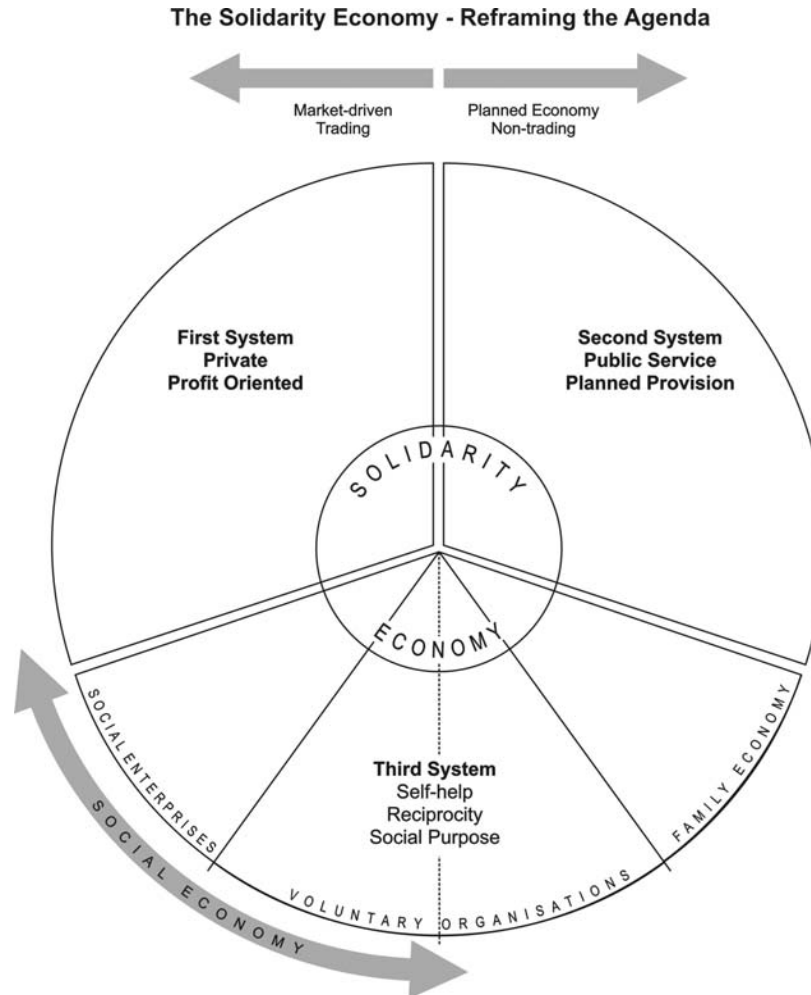
# The CED – Social Economy Linkage

**Environmental Stewardship**



**Strengthening Citizen Engagement  
& Social Interconnectedness**

# A third perspective – the solidarity or social solidarity economy



# Mapping the Social Economy from the Ground Up: A Calgary Neighbourhood Study

- Structurally (e.g. re legal status), the sectors are reasonably distinct
- Functionally, the boundaries become blurrier
- In terms of ethos, values, broader goals and role in community, the boundaries blur further
- Experientially, ideologically and even recreationally, there exists the distinct sectors, but there also exists significant overlap and a class of entities at the nexus that blend characteristics and aims to some degree



# A different way of seeing – Three lenses for viewing society

- ❖ Social economy as the third sector, civil society, etc.
- ❖ Social economy as the part of the third sector that uses business means to pursue social ends
- ❖ Social economy as an ethos, set of values, and approach to practice that can ‘socialize’ the mainstream economy and build a ‘new economy’ (the solidarity economy)

# Adding a third leg to the economic and social

## The SEE Change

- *Increasingly, a third pillar is being added to the blending of economic and social goals that has been the hallmark of the social economy, that of the ecological.*
- *Increasingly, social and ecological economists refer to a triple bottom line in defining the aims both of the sector and of aspirations for broader economic activity by all sectors of the economy.*
- *Sustainability and the social economy*
- *The SEE Change – relocalization in the face of climate change and peak oil*